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WHEN Singapore FELL

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BISHOP IN CHARGE OF THE SINGAPORE AREA
THE METHODIST CHURCH

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1884-

War burst upon Singapore on a clear moonlit morning while the people slumbered. It was the same day of the Pearl Harbor tragedy, but a little earlier. Within an hour I stood in the mass of broken glass and tumbled buildings in Singapore's business center trying to realize that the destruction around me was not a nightmare. It was real enough.

Mr. Homer Cheng, leading Foochow Methodist, shuddered as he stepped over the dead and dying in his attempt to reach the Chinese Protectorate, where he serves as chief interpreter. Faces everywhere were amazed and horror-stricken, presaging the great disillusionment which all too rapidly was to creep across the country.

On this day Conference Committees were in session. Many members had already arrived from as far away as Penang and Borneo. It seemed advisable to wire others to remain in their stations, since the disconcerting news had come that our northern airfield had been seized.

Conference was in session for four days—unsettled days, when newspapers vied with reports for attention. Wesley Church windows were being replaced by

wooden boards. The shriek of the siren sent us into the Church Hall for more adequate protection against raids, just at the time the Anglican Bishop had started to address us.

Black-outs precluded the holding of evening sessions. Nights disturbed by "alerts" made a bad prelude to a day of Conference.

A Chinese pastor, Edward Lauw, B.A., B.D., with his wife and two young sons, were the first to be made homeless. He was given notice by the military, shortly after the first bombing, to abandon the Geylang Methodist property where the parsonage, school, and church were so strategically placed. The military moved into the house and school. The Lauws found temporary residence at our Oldham Hall Boarding School until that too was taken over by the Australian Hospital unit.

DESTRUCTION IN PENANG

What was happening in the north was exceedingly difficult to learn. Before the week was ended we knew.

Penang, with our beautiful churches and homes and schools and people, had been made a shambles. Four hundred European women and children had been rushed off with little or no baggage on the train for Singapore. Wesley Church Hall, like many such buildings in Singapore, became a temporary haven of refuge until the evacuees could sail to safer lands.

Among the hundreds of awe-struck citizens of Penang who rushed out of the burning city to the hills or country was our Chinese District Superintendent, Timothy Huang. He succeeded in getting his family and other Chinese girls down to rural Sitiawan, but when he went back to gather up a few possessions and food, he was unable to reach the city. The Japanese began broadcasting from Penang's radio station at once, jamming the news which nightly we depended upon from KGEI in San Francisco.

Consternation seized us when the British battleships, the "Prince of Wales" and the "Repulse," were sunk, thus destroying the advance of the British Navy which was to have checked the oncoming enemy transports.

CHURCHES AND SCHOOLS

One of our churches in Sitiawan was taken over and demolished by the military because it was in a direct line between their defense and an air field.

Faster and faster came the enemy, outnumbering our soldiers frequently five to one. As each time our line "made an orderly retreat" the people ran without order into the jungle and near-by rubber gardens.

Our Ipoh School grounds received a direct hit. The beautiful new Girls' School building in Taiping was occupied by British staff officers barely two weeks after the day of its opening. Subsequently we were informed it had been bombed.

No sooner had all our missionaries from the north reached Kuala Lumpur than it too was visited by the enemy. They swooped low, dropping pamphlets which informed the people that they would return in the afternoon at four o'clock or the following morning at eleven. They kept their engagements.

Civilian life became demoralized. Food shops boarded up their buildings. Would the Public Services crumple up, just as they had in Penang? "Get out now," commanded the police or the military. And hundreds of cars crept through the blackness of night to escape the machine-gunning by day on the highways and trains.

Kuala Lumpur, like Penang, like Ipoh, and every other town along the way, became a ghost city. Malacca Methodists were out of the city just an hour before bombs began to kill and destroy in that ancient stronghold. Scorning to take their possessions they made room for the frantic people in cars and buses.

Miss Eva M. Sadler was able to get the Shellabear Hall girls safely to Singapore, and to put them to the service of running a canteen which served five hundred persons daily.

"HOLD SINGAPORE"

"We shall hold Singapore," was the general hope and faith. Its 650,000 normal population was increased to a war-time 1,000,000.

The evacuees had left behind them everything they

possessed, and the hope of their future. European men had been compelled to destroy hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of rubber, tin, and machinery. Buildings had been blown up.

Within six weeks Singapore had become a beleaguered city. The enemy concentrated upon it. No day or night was without its wailing sirens, its "stick" of bombs. Against their noise our "ack-ack" antiaircraft fire was feeble, and our chief hope was in planes—the planes which never came.

Our school vacation period was to have ended on January 5th, but was postponed to the 12th. After a few days the Director of Education put it off indefinitely. Bombing usually occurred during the hour when children were on the way to school. At school they were certain to spend far too much time in shelters. And shelters very often were not well drained, being little more than hurriedly dug ditches.

Many of our missionaries had sailed for India or the U. S. A., but there were about thirty assembled in Singapore by this time. They and many of our nationals were entering heartily into all sorts of war services. The one aim of life was to keep the enemy back. All else became secondary.

ORDINATION IN WAR

To bring congregations together in the churches became hazardous. An ordination service for the Rev. Carleton H. Foss, missionary in Ipoh, which

had been postponed at Conference, took place on January 18th in one of our suburban Chinese churches. Our school nearby was being used as an Air Raid Precaution station. I asked one of the wardens to signal us if the bombers should come dangerously near, otherwise we would not heed an "alert."

The congregation responded with splendid morale when the alert did sound, showing no concern. But the planes were headed directly over us, and when the warden shouted "take cover," everyone dropped to the floor, crouched against the wall or under the seats.

The deafening thud, thud, thud, lasted for several minutes and fortunately brought us no harm, but bombs did strike less than 100 yards away. We proceeded with the beautiful service, singing hymns of peace and joy. As usual, we scattered quickly when the service ended.

On the Tuesday following I shared in the last rites over the body of the leading layman of that church who had been hit during one of the heaviest raids, when 125 planes were over Singapore, leaving 1,000 casualties to suffer or die.

WITHDRAWAL OF MISSIONARIES

Singapore became more and more a battlefield. Because of its isolation from the rest of the world, business firms began to move to Java. I considered

it advisable to transfer our offices, also, to Java and requested the withdrawal of all missionaries, in the hope that in Java, Australia, or India, they might find satisfactory places to serve until the siege of Malaya should be relieved.

The Asiatic members of our Mission Work Committee unanimously approved this plan. The responsibility for carrying on was then placed upon a splendid group of pastors and laymen. It is quite likely that Malaya-born Chinese and Indians will receive less harsh treatment from the enemy than China-born Chinese, Europeans, and Americans.

From a Tokyo broadcast, shortly after their indiscriminate bombing of Malay mosques and Manila churches had been condemned from many sources, we heard the Japanese deny their intention of destroying any houses of worship, "for," they said, "the Japanese are godly people themselves." From this we take some hope that they may allow our church buildings to remain undisturbed.

The twenty-two of us who sailed from Singapore barely escaped the cargo of death dropped over us by twenty-seven Japanese bombers as we lay tied up to the dock. Ships and store-houses beside us burst into flames, enveloping us in heavy clouds of smoke which was apparently our salvation.

Two others of our number, the Rev. and Mrs. Eugene McGraw, were, fortunately, on the shore in a Sumatra port when the enemy bombed their ship, which was burned.

Mrs. J. M. Hoover, so long a Borneo missionary, was en route to Australia a few days before Singapore fell, on a ship which normally carried thirty passengers. Thirty more were permitted to take passage, and fifteen hundred troops were allowed to travel below. Before this valuable cargo could sail three hundred and twenty-seven civilians, without money, passports, or baggage, boarded the vessel. The bombing was terrific but they were able to make the first port in Java.

Our missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Darel McFerran, were able to leave Sumatra after their station, Palembang, with its rich oil fields, had been captured by eight hundred Japanese parachute troops.

FIVE REMAINED BEHIND

Five American missionaries were left in Singapore when the U. S. Consul General finally departed. He understood they would leave at "the last minute," others have understood that it was the intention of at least one or two of them to remain to the end.

Two families remaining in Sumatra are from neutral Sweden. It is possible for them to get up into the Batak hinterland away from danger which may assail them in their present stations near the coast.

The Rev. Burr Baughman chose to remain when the Japanese entered Selangor. Our prayer is that he is safe in the hills, ministering to his primitive wards, the Sakai.

HOW WE HAVE SUFFERED

Certainly Methodist work has suffered much in Malaya.

Before we left Singapore we knew of the damage to some of our buildings. Penang, including our beautiful church and large secondary school, had been almost destroyed. One of our churches in Sitiawan was demolished by the military because it stood between their line of defense guns and an air field. The Ipoh school was struck by bombs. The new building of the Methodist Girls' School in Taiping was also hit. One church, at least, and several other Methodist buildings in Singapore were badly damaged. Two other churches lost their roofs but suffered little structural damage.

But property loss or damage can always be replaced and repaired. It is in people, not property, that we are concerned as missionaries. Scores—perhaps hundreds—of our Methodist people were killed or injured by bombs and by oncoming soldiers. Many hundreds were driven from their homes, though doubtless they are by now drifting slowly back into the towns from the rubber plantations and jungles, or are finding new ways of making a living. These are resourceful people and will not "lie down" before difficult situations.

Our most serious loss, however, is that grant-in-aid schools, in which we had 22,500 students, now are without funds for teachers, and this probably means

they are closed. Our so-called "private" schools, operated by the churches and mission and carried on in school properties after regular hours, can probably be reorganized. These are maintained by the fees of pupils, and, assuming that anyone has funds or means of labor, pupils should be available. In these private schools it has always been possible in the past to teach the Christian religion as a part of the curriculum without restrictions. The smaller schools out in the villages will also probably carry on normally.

The Church in Malaya can more readily continue than can the school system. The churches have for years been practically self-supporting and it will not be a severe shock to them to lose the small mission aid they received from local (not U. S. A.) funds.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

What of the future?

Methodists need not fear that the Church they have reared during fifty-six years of sacrifice in Malaya will disappear during the temporary residence of Japanese overlords. It will remain and triumph, for it is not made of buildings but of Christian personality.

During the last fourteen years nationals have assumed responsibility. Now eighteen of the twenty-three District Superintendents in this area are Filipinos, Chinese, East Indians, and Sumatra Bataks. The devastation all around them can scarcely be in-

spiring. They must be filled with doubts and anguish.

"Haven't they lost their faith in the white man?" is the common question. Doubtless many of them have. But the successful missionaries, the true missionaries to Malaya, did not carry a "white man's" Gospel to the Orient. Therefore they are now able to feel that at the end of its fifty-six years of service our Church has developed a genuine fraternity, a Christian brotherhood among the many nationalities.

IN TRUSTED HANDS

Before we left Singapore the work was placed in competent hands.

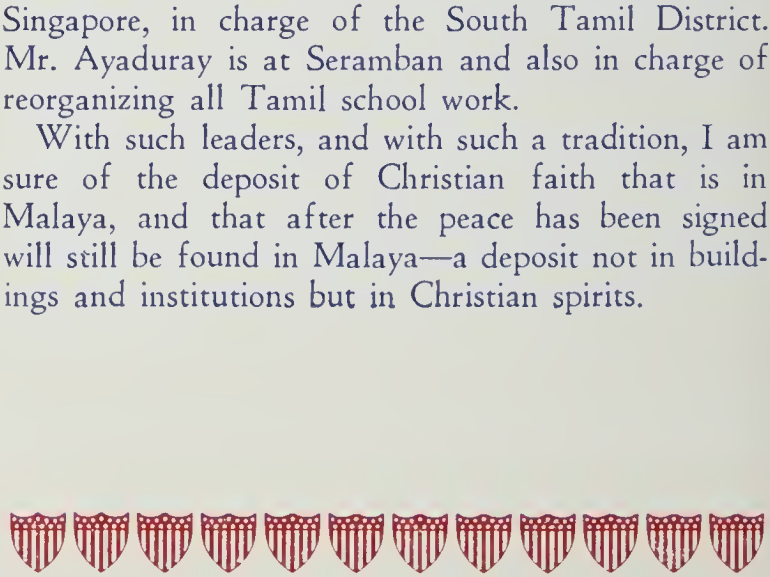
In Kuala Lampur, as superintendent of the Central Chinese District, I left the Rev. C. E. Fang, one of our best-educated younger leaders. He is tactful, energetic, and resourceful, and I am certain the work will prosper under his leadership. The Rev. Hong Hang Keng is superintendent of the Singapore Chinese District—another experienced and gifted leader, beloved by the whole city. The Rev. John Chua is in Seramban, from which center he will administer churches and schools in the wide Malacca-Negri-Sembilan District. The Rev. Timothy Huang is superintendent of the Penang District—and by now may have been able to return there.

When the war broke the two Chinese district superintendents from Borneo were in Singapore for

our conference. Neither was able to leave Singapore. So I telegraphed to the Rev. Wong King Hwo, who had retired from the ministry and superintendency a year ago, and appointed him acting superintendent of all Methodist work in Borneo. I know he will make good—he is a tried leader. He was one of the Foochow Christians who forty years ago migrated from China to Borneo, and who during all those years was a close associate of the late James M. Hoover, our pioneer missionary to Borneo. Today we have fifty-six Methodist churches in Borneo and Wong King Hwo knows them all. The two "refugee superintendents" will work with the Chinese churches in Malaya.

The Rev. S. M. Thevathasam, M.A., and the Rev. J. V. Ayaduray were left in charge of the Indian Christian work—a service Methodism has been conducting among the Tamil immigrants from South India and their children. Mr. Thevathasam is in Singapore, in charge of the South Tamil District. Mr. Ayaduray is at Seramban and also in charge of reorganizing all Tamil school work.

With such leaders, and with such a tradition, I am sure of the deposit of Christian faith that is in Malaya, and that after the peace has been signed will still be found in Malaya—a deposit not in buildings and institutions but in Christian spirits.



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